

# HOW TO: VIRTUAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## *How to Advocate from a Distance*

How do you advocate when in-person gatherings and meetings are not possible? Thankfully, the principles for civic engagement are not terribly different. Here are three ways to make your voice heard from home!

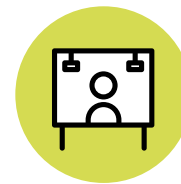
### Virtual Civic Engagement Opportunities



PHONE CALLS



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



VIRTUAL LOBBY VISITS

Find your representative and how to get in touch with them at [virginiageneralassembly.gov](http://virginiageneralassembly.gov).

#### PHONE CALLS



Find your legislator's phone number on [virginiageneralassembly.gov](http://virginiageneralassembly.gov) (and double-check who they are with the "Who's My Legislator?" function).

Prepare and deliver a quick script that covers these bases:

- Politely introduce yourself and identify yourself as a constituent.
- If you have any particular issue expertise, briefly mention it.
- Make 1-2 points about the topic you have called to discuss.
- Make an explicit ask; i.e. "I am calling to ask Senator Lewis to support at least \$100 million per year for the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share program"
- Thank them for their time.

Get five (or more!) of your peers to call that same day. Ask each of them to ask three friends to call, too.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



##### Prepare

- Find recent articles in local newspapers that cover the topic you wish to discuss.
- Research the guidelines for your local paper, including the maximum word count and the required personal information to include.
- Choose 1-2 major talking points to focus on.

**Structure** - see [NRDC's Guide](#) for an in-depth explanation.

- **The hook:** attention-grabbing first sentence that states the topic at hand.
- **The facts:** 1-2 facts about the issue.
- **The personal touch:** explain why this issue is important to you personally.
- **The ask:** name your target (Governor, a particular legislator, etc) and state clearly what you think they should do.

##### After

- Call the newspaper the following day to confirm they received it and ask whether they plan to publish it
- If published, send your legislators an email including the article and repeat your ask, and ask friends and neighbors in the district to do the same

*For questions or more information, please contact [engagement@vcnva.org](mailto:engagement@vcnva.org) or call (804) 644-0283.*



Because in-person district office visits are not always viable, many legislators are open to setting up virtual meetings with constituents. These follow the same format as an in-person lobby meeting, with the additional benefit of being able to quickly share links to relevant resources.

### Setting up the meeting

- Recruit 2-3 in-district friends to help prepare and deliver some of the agenda (and make a bigger impression).
- Call your legislator's district office number, identify yourself as a constituent, and ask the staff person who answers about setting up a virtual meeting. Let them know how many people you expect to attend.
- Suggest a few 30-minute windows and prepare to be flexible.

### Running the meeting

This structure will help you stay on track during the meeting:

- **Introduction:** make a personal connection to your legislator.
- **Present the issue:** spend 2-3 minutes talking about the issue(s) at hand, and back that up with a few compelling facts.
- **Tell your personal story:** connect the issue to the personal experience of you or someone you know.
- **Ask:** directly make your request, and ask what their current position is.
- **Invite questions:** if the legislator is not immediately on board, ask what questions they have or what further information they might need.
- **Wrap up:** thank them for their time and let them know you will follow up with any information they requested.

### Follow up

- One person should be point on following up with a thank-you email including any requested information.
- As decision-making time for the issue you discussed approaches, ask each attendee to make a call to the legislator's office to thank them for your earlier meeting and express that you hope to see them make the right decision.

#### Best practices for video conferencing (using Google Hangouts, Zoom, or Skype Meet Now):

- In any group meeting (an LTE writing party or lobby meeting, for example), divvy up the agenda and assign attendees roles in advance.
- Mute when not speaking.
- Use the chat box to share helpful links and resources.

**Active conservationists like you are what make the difference for our lands, waters, and wildlife.  
Thank you for being a voice for the conservation movement.**

